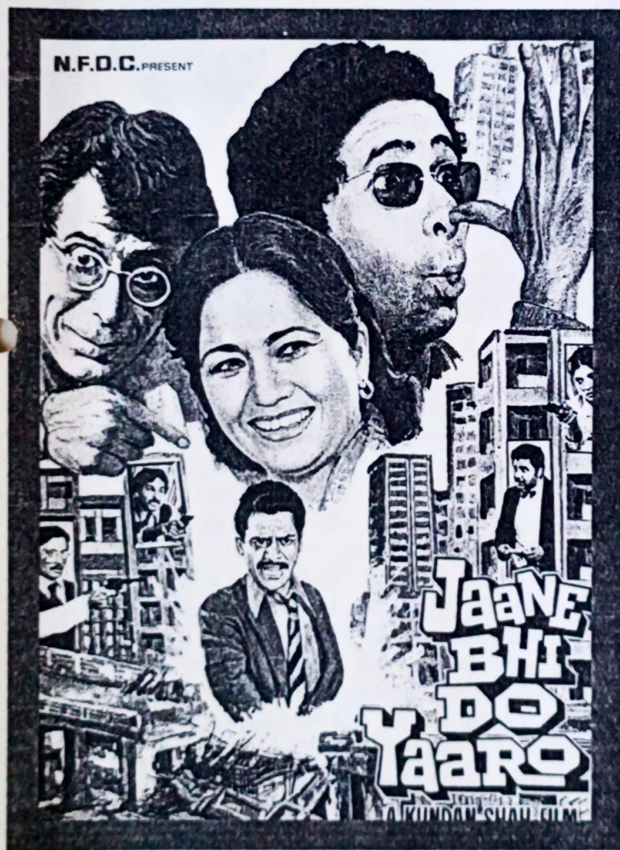




DEAD SERIOUS

THE MAKING OF *JAANE BHI DO YAARO*



An errant water pipe holds the distinction of being the trigger behind some of the most inspired scenes in that madcap classic, *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*. Director Kundan Shah tells the tale: "There was a leaky pipe in my building and, as a result, some of the gutter water from the drainage seeped into our drinking water. I had to get it repaired, but dealing with the government officials was a nightmare. All my frustrations found their way into the script of *JBDY*. Remember the 'gutter speech' at Ahuja's funeral?"

This incident, like many others, contributed to the making of *JBDY*. In fact, the behind-the-scenes story qualifies for a film in itself; it's a heady concoction of grim truths and ironies, interspersed with the quirks of life.

It was 1976. A bunch of enthusiasts—including Kundan Shah and Satish Shah—had just passed out of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), and were readying themselves for a glorious career in films. Reality hit them fairly quickly as they realised that an endless period of struggle awaited them. Despite the hype about new wave cinema, there weren't many opportunities for those interested in creatively satisfying work. Editors, directors, actors... they

were all grounded. Survival was the main aim.

Recalls Kundan Shah, "We started a commune in Hyderabad and took on whatever came our way—co-operative films, commercials, documentaries and short films. But it got worse by the day. Many gave up the struggle and returned to their homes. I travelled to and fro for a year-and-a-half and finally gave up."

Life was tough but two of Kundan's fellow mates, Ravi Ojha and Rajendra Show, hung on. "They opened a photo studio. Imagine, a director and an editor doing industrial photography! Around that time, Ravi visited me and we sat up the whole night talking. He described all their mad experiences vividly; it was tragic and

writer), Ranjit Kapoor (dialogue writer), Vidhu Vinod Chopra (production head), Binod Pradhan (cinematographer), Renu Sahuja (editor), Satish Kaushik (actor, dialogue writer) and Vauraj Bhatia (music director). Besides, Saeed Mirza, whom Kundan had assisted during *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai*, was a constant source of strength and advice.

The biggest star in the cast was Naseeruddin Shah but his entry into the film was a cinch. Kundan had worked with him in *Albert Pinto...* and the actor had promised to work in Kundan's first film. He kept his word.

Talented actors from the FTIL, NSD and theatre were lined up in no time. They did their parts with all the enthusiasm of newcomers and the dexterity of veterans, even though most of them were quite

ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING THAT COULD GO WRONG, DID GO WRONG WITH THE FILM

—Pankaj Kapoor



Action: Kundan Shah on location of *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron*



Merry-go-round: Om Puri, Satish Kaushik and Pankaj Kapoor

yet so funny," remembers the director.

The water pipe had already done the initial damage. Rajendra's experiences got the director all charged and *JBDY* was born. The words tumbled out furiously; "I was inspired by Charlie Chaplin. Instinctively, I knew what a gag was. All I had to do was string a bunch together and weave them into situations," says Kundan.

Meanwhile, the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) offered to produce a film for Kundan and sanctioned a budget of Rs 6.84 lakh. It eventually stretched to Rs 7.25 lakh.

Now began the frenzy of casting, location hunting and production detailing. The roll call was impressive; it was the coming together of some of the brightest talent in the industry—Kundan Shah (director, script-writer), Sudhir Mishra (assistant director, script-

underpaid. "Naseer was paid Rs 15,000 so you can imagine how much the rest of us got. Om and I got Rs 5,000 each," reveals Satish Shah.

Ravi Baswani, who was recommended by Sudhir Mishra, ended up playing his namesake, Sudhir. "Kundan asked me to choose and I immediately said, the dead body. But he already had Satish in mind," recalls Ravi.

Ironically, Satish Shah was not happy with his role. "It was my first break and I couldn't have refused. But I felt the role of a corpse was as good as a photograph on the wall. No one had attempted it before and I accepted it as a challenge," he says.

Pankaj Kapoor was Tarneja, the smooth-talking builder, and Satish Kaushik, his bumbling secretary, Ashok. Incidentally, Pankaj was initially scheduled to play Ahuja, the over-the-top, shady

Punjabi contractor. When the actor doing Tarneja's role opted out, Pankaj stepped in. And Om Puri grabbed the opportunity to break out of his serious image with Ahuja. "Until then, I was considered this intense actor who could only do tragic roles. Besides, I was an introvert and wouldn't fool around or joke like I do now. So it was a good break for me," says Om.

Kundan wanted Aparna Sen to play the role of editor Shobha but he laughs. "She fell asleep while listening to the script. Deepti Naval and Smita Patil were my next choices but it didn't work out with either of them. Bhakti Barve agreed immediately, without even inquiring about her remuneration."

If it seemed like fun 'n' games till now, the shooting turned out to be another story. Deadlines were strict—the film had to be canned within two months in Mumbai and nearby Alibaug. Permissions were obtained, groundwork rushed through and the camera got rolling double-fast.

The tight budget meant the production unit had to keep expenses severely in check. The unit comprised 120 members but the food (strictly vegetar-

"Anything and everything that could go wrong, did go wrong with the film. But we all hung on together," says Pankaj. "I don't know how we managed," says Kundan Shah. "We went location hunting by bus and local trains, even on cycles. We stole electricity as well. Vinod got clothes from Mr Ramanand Sagar (of *Ramayan* fame) and had them altered for the *Mahabharata* sequence."

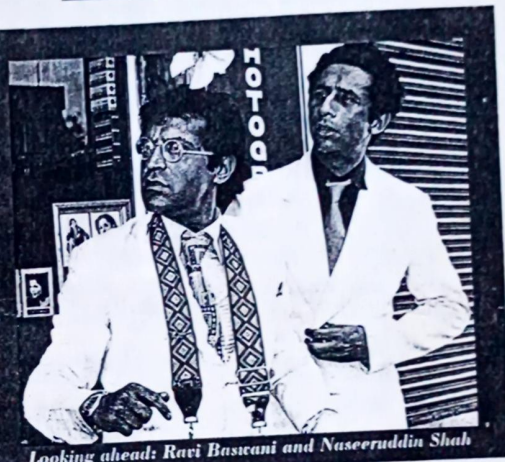
At one point, when they ran into a financial crisis, Naseer even offered to forego his fees. "Don't pay me but complete the film," he told Kundan. "Not only that," says Kundan, "the Nikon camera we used in the film was his. And though it was stolen on the last day of the shoot, he didn't complain ever."

Mishaps and misfortunes notwithstanding, the spirits on the sets never flagged. "So many cre-

NASEER OFFERED TO FOREGO HIS FEES. "DON'T PAY ME BUT COMPLETE THE FILM," HE TOLD KUNDAN SHAH



Kaun? Satish Kaushik and Naseeruddin Shah



Looking ahead: Ravi Baswani and Naseeruddin Shah

ian) supplied at mealtimes was always enough just for 40. Those who got to the table first, ate. The rest... we don't know.

Shooting was continuous and most of the actors were present throughout. "Naseer and Ravi were the only stars. Considering how busy we were then, we didn't mind hanging around," jests Satish.

Rest had to be grabbed in intervals... and wherever possible. Recalls Om, "I remember the cameraman once slept with his head on the camera. People would even spread towels and sleep on the verandah." Naseer taught Ravi Baswani how to catch 40 winks under the bed.

These were just some of the problems on hand.

ative geniuses were under one roof and each one came up with wacky ideas and solutions," says Sudhir Mishra.

Vinod Chopra (of *Parinda*, *Mission Kashmir* fame) lent his old Austin to be used by Ahuja in the scene in which he has a drunken conversation with the corpse. "Kaun si modddel hai? Oh ho, sport car hai, arrey apni to Austin gaddi hai, eh heh, old ij goldd, eh bhai?"

The collapse of the flyover shown in the TV news clip is actual footage of Mumbai's Byculla flyover, which collapsed shortly before the film was made. The names Tarneja and Ahuja were inspired by the well-known Mumbai builders, Raheja.

Shobha, the editor of *Khabardaar* magazine, was a take-off on Shobha Kilachand (now Dē), former editor of *Stardust*.

The two photographers were named after Sudhir Mishra and Vinod Chopra. Says Mishra, "It was all in jest. It helped because it created an atmosphere of camaraderie. The code word, Albert Pinto, used by the two sleuths referred to Saeed Mirza's film *Albert Pinto...*"

Antonioni Park, where the protagonists click the photograph of D'Mello's killing and blow up the pictures, was a bow to Hollywood director Antonioni's film *Blow Up*.

Kundan's frustrations with the water pipe incident were evident in the speech made by the new municipal commissioner Srivastava (Deepak Qazir) in memory of D'Mello: "Woh gutter ke liye jiye, aur gutter ke liye mare. Woh kaha karte the ki kisi desh ki unnati uske gutter se jani jati hai. Unhone apni saari zindagi gutter mein guzaar di."

Plus, they took some risks. The trolley scene at the building under construction, for instance, was shot without any safety aids. Recalls Satish Shah, "There were four of us—Pankaj Kapoor, Neena Gupta, Satish Kaushik and I—and we were all really scared. It was a pretty long shot and we went through many rehearsals because we couldn't afford to goof up. The shot was okayed in one take!"

Satish, as the corpse, was subjected to quite a bit of man-handling. Laughs Ravi. "We had to ensure that he didn't fall off." Satish says that he concentrated on making sure his position remained consistent. "The rest was a cakewalk. No, I never laughed. I have pretty good control over my expressions."

Naseer had some misgivings; he wasn't too con-



Bhakti Barre and Neena Gupta in the Mahabharata sequence



Naseeruddin Shah and Satish Shah as the veiled Draupadi aka the corpse

vined about the phone sequence in which Vinod and Ashok talk to each other in the same room. "Naseer found the idea of telephones falling and getting exchanged rather stupid. But once we got him to agree, he carried it off with the flamboyance it required," says Kundan.

Once the film was canned, it was time for editor Renu Saluja to take over. "We had to edit a lot because we had over four hours of footage. We couldn't exceed the 2.25 hours limit, otherwise the excise rates would increase," explains Kundan. (How about giving us the rest of the footage in *The Making of JBDY*, Mr Shah?)

As a result, some actors who got a mention in the credits weren't seen in the film. Like Anupam Kher, who according to Sudhir Mishra, played a Disco Killer in the film. "Many great scenes were cut. There was another scene in which a gorilla escapes from a circus, for instance. But Renu did a wonderful job with the editing. She turned the film around."

JBDY had its first showing at a film festival held in Mumbai in 1984 and went on to win the National Award for the best debut film that year. At the box office, it was an average earner and managed to recover its cost for NFDC.

It was only after the television boom hit India that the film acquired cult status. Both fans and the industry suddenly woke up to this flawless black comedy which mocked the civic administration, the police, the press and big business with equal relish.

Nineteen years on, the cast and crew have moved on. Obviously, the film holds a special place in the hearts of all those involved in the making. Actor Ravi Baswani sums it up best: "I wish I had died after that. At least, I would have become immortal. It's been difficult to live up to *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*."

Hamida Parkar

KUNDAN SHAH WANTED APARNA SEN TO PLAY THE EDITOR'S ROLE BUT SHE FELL ASLEEP WHILE LISTENING TO THE SCRIPT!